

## It's Hands On at Duxbury Beach

By the Rev. CANON ROBERT MERRY



A close view of High Pines with beach plum bushes in the foreground.

If you had driven to the east end of Gurnet Bridge early on a recent Sunday morning, you would have been perplexed by the sight of a cluster of a dozen people, 3 wearing police badges, huddled against a chilly breeze and apparently engaged in some serious business.

It was the Duxbury Beach Committee meeting on the spot to make and receive reports of the status of the beach and engage later in a survey led by the Town Harbormaster, Don Beers, and his executive, Peter Schney. I had been invited along to do a story as I also wanted to know what was happening to the beach.

The co-chairman, Kay Foster, took command of the moment and after a brief update asked the group if they would like to nominate Harriet Merry to membership on the board of trustees of the Beach Reservation. Harriet, she said, had been on the committee by appointment of the Town Moderator, Allen Bornheimer, since its inception 9 years ago, and had signified her intention to resign as of June 1. It was as a reward for service as well as a birthday present on her coming 80th birthday. It was unanimously approved and she was told of her first meeting at Battelle the following Saturday.

Kay noted the absence of committee members, Chief of Police Capuccio, Les Smith, and David Volgler.

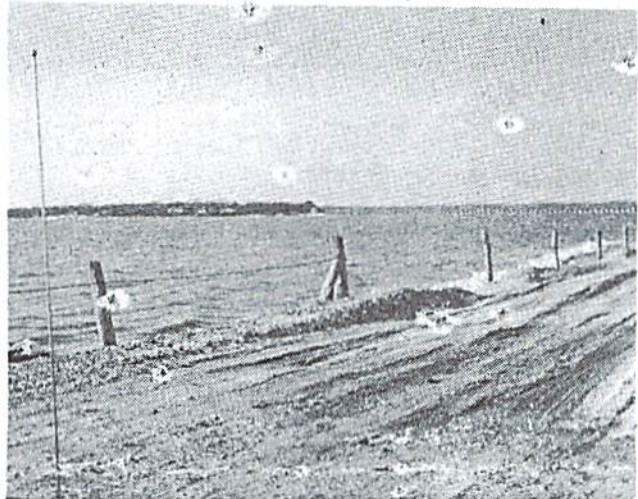
**Duxbury Clipper. Wednesday, May 22, 1996**

Other committee members present were John Nash, representing the Reservation, Frank Chipman of the Beach Buggy Assn, Kathy Brown, a resident of nearby Gurnet Rd., and Joe Grady, Conservation Administrator, whose 4x4 pick-up, I noted, was loaded with beach maintenance material (fencing, beach plum bushes and grass lumps). I checked later with his secretary, Pam Johnson, and reaffirmed my opinion, that Joe was planning to spend that day working on the beach as an employee of the reservation, who leases the beach to the town for an annual fee.

Joe has been planting Rosa Rugosa and beach plum shrubs since large areas of the grass were devastated in the dry summer preceding. Since 1991, the beach reservation people have been working to diversify the beach flora and Rosa has been successful as it is planted in ever larger clumps and is resistant to major storms remaining upright to trap water-borne sand unlike the beach grass which flattens in the face of such storms.

There was a chill breeze of about 25 miles per hour with white caps peek-a-booing all across the bay in back of us. John Nash took a moment to point out the path of handicap access to the outer beach off the other side of the parking lot and said it was hoped to be ready by Memorial Day.

As I stood there, my mind flashed back, not only to my own boyhood when swimming and over-nighting as a Boy Scout, plus driving a horse and wagon down the beach to replenish the gunning stands with supplies, but my mind also reflected on the early days of the beach when it was purchased by the Wright family to be developed into 263 house lots. The plan was abandoned



Powder Point from Duxbury Beach.



as a result of 2 back to back blizzards in 1888 and 1889, which lowered the dunes from 35 to 40 feet high to 15 and 20 feet, and would have washed all these planned cottages into the sea as Hurricane Donna did to 329 houses on the Jersey shore in recent memory.

I couldn't help noting the flatness of the beach in contrast to my youthful experiences here. As part of the beach development, the Wrights had pledged one third of the cost of the Bridge, i.e., \$10,000 (the present bridge cost \$3,000,000). But despite the loss of the land as a project to benefit the town, (the town meeting in 1895 believing this was a bonanza for the town, passed a resolution of appreciation to the Wrights).

All this and more came back to my mind as I recalled the days before the bridge when the Neck River channels and marsh harbored an industrial area of major proportions; the Ford and Weston enterprises, welcoming 3 and 4-masted schooners to the Bourne Wharf. The construction of the bridge was fought in town meeting but because of a draw allowing ships to go through, it was finally passed.

At this point, most of us being thoroughly chilled Don loaded us into 4x4's and we headed out on the beach road. He pointed out first that Peter had painted all the posts white with luminous paint, the same that is used by the government in its national parks. He also pointed to the restoration of the road shoulders eroded by our catastrophic recent winter and said "Fred Nava had to dig down 3 feet and fill the ditch with rocks to strengthen that side of the road." This we were told was a legal right of way to Gurnet and Saquish.

At this point we met a couple walking a big golden retriever without a leash. Don pulled to a stop and asked them if they would do him a favor. I could not overhear what the favor was, but on checking with Don later over the phone, I found that it was to put their dog on a leash. "This," Don said, "was for 2 reasons - one, to protect the nesting birds, and 2, to keep the dog from harassing people."

We then headed the wagon out over the hectic piles of small stones and stopped. It was a great sight, from Gurnet and High Pines all the way to Blackman's point. Don pointed out the sand bar in front of us and said that in northeast storms, this point drives beach material up onto the existing base and helps build up the dunes. The snow fences could also be seen to slow the wind and force it to drop its load of sand and help restore the beach.

We could not help noticing the yellow police strips marking off the restricted areas where the plovers are nesting. Don said this program of protection for the birds, did not begin until 1991 and much of its success depends upon the cooperation of beach users. Don never failed to compliment townspeople who he said "realize what a treasure this beach is and are determined to preserve it at all costs."

Its preservation took on an anguished aspect in the "No Name Storm of 1991." Don reported to me as I did a story about it, that at the height of that storm, he was driving across the bridge and he saw the surf breaking over the beach, its entire length. But thanks to the labor and imagination and quick response of the Army Corps of Engineers, the Emergency Management people and scores of others, we still have the beach.

For many years we took the beach for granted as we do the ocean, but now we realize we have to care for it and many are responding to its call for rescue especially to plant grass.

I entitled this article, "It's Hands On" to remind us that the Beach Committee, the Reservation and the Conservation Commission, under Joe Grady, are hard at work to see to it that this "spit of land" as the geologists call it, will be preserved for future generations.



The flattened beach after the 2 storms in 1991.

Our last stop was at the "Pavilion", the recreational facility at the northern end of the beach, being shown around by Gordon Leighton, its custodian, who helped us understand the pivotal financial resource this facility provides. So under the watchful eye of the reservation, its resources will be directed to the careful use of Duxbury Beach.

Don complimented the citizens of the town, the volunteer workers and the town maintenance people as he showed how the posts have been topped in white as in the nations' parks. The winter erosion of the bay side now shored up with new loads of gravel, the cost of which has been borne by "The Reservation."

At this point it may be useful to point out the way the beach is managed. First of all, it is now owned by the "Reservation," a non-profit entity existing as in other "Reservations" throughout the State. Now this is leased to the town for its recreational use. Materials for maintenance (such as posts and fencing and loads of sand and gravel) are paid for by this organization for which the town provides the manpower for patrolling and general maintenance of the beach. It is a cooperative enterprise depending on the support of the town's citizens, and both the "Reservation" and the Beach Committee. This latter includes 3 persons appointed by the selectmen, 3 members of the reservation and 3 civic minded citizens appointed by the town moderator. All of these groups and individuals work together and in recent years as a response to 2 northeast storms, have taken a genuine "Hands On" attitude toward the beach and the waters that lap its shores.